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ABSTRACT

Although research in nonverbal communication is in its seventh decade, the origins of individual differences in nonverbl sensitivity remain. To investigate the relationship between family norms of emotional expression and nonverbal communication, 64 college students completed the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire, were videotaped while conversing about emotional topics, and were asked to judge tapes of confederates in similar situations. Results suggested that individuals whose families valued emotional display had greater expressiveness, while individuals whose familes inhibited emotional display had greater perceptiveness relative to individuals whose families valued emotional display. The findings suggest that because a relationship between family norms of emotional expression and nonverbal communication has been identified, future research should focus on how these nonverbal communication differences due to socialization develop. (Author/JAC)

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The Relationship Between Family Expressiveness and Nonverbal Communication

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between family norms of emotional expression and nonverbal communication. Specific predictions were a) individuals whose families value emotional display would have greater expressiveness (sending), relative to individuals whose families inhibit emotional display, and b) individuals whose families inhibit emotional display would have greater perceptiveness (judging), relative to individuals whose families value emotional display.

Sixty-four undergraduates filled out the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire, were videotaped while conversing with confederates about emotional topics (sending), and judged videotape segments of the confederates in similar situations (judging).

The predicted relationships between family norms of emotional expression and both sending and judging nonverbal communication occurred.

The Relationship Between Family Expressiveness and Nonverbal Communication

Although research in nonverbal communication is in its seventh decade, the origins of individual differences in nonverbal sensitivity remain an enigma. This study is an investigation of the relationships between family norms of emotional expression and nonverbal communication.

A general relationship between family values and the nonverbal communication of the individual was first suggested by Lanzetta and Kleck (1970). They hypothesized that some individuals have been punished by "socializing agents" for engaging in overt displays of emotionality. These individuals have learned to inhibit such displays, thus depressing skill in sending nonverbal cues. Their assumption is that our "natural state" is an expressive one, and socializing agents act only to discourage emotional expression, and never act to encourage it. When socialization is unsuccessful and the family environment is high in expressiveness, individuals do not have to work hard to perceive the emotional states of family members; these individuals would be high in emotional expression but low in perception of expression. When socialization is successful and the family environment is low in expressiveness, individuals must become sensitive to the most subtle displays of emotion in order to relate effectively

with their family members. As a consequence of family inhibition, these individuals would become low in expression, but high in perception of expression.

Based upon this lead, several researchers have posited a relationship between nonverbal skill and socialization (generally socialization within the family; e.g., Izard, 1971; Zuckerman, Lipets, Koivumaki, & Rosenthal, 1975; and Zuckerman, Hall, DeFrank, & Rosenthal, 1976), but no one has examined this relationship systematically.

This study assumes that family values can also work to encourage display of emotion as well as inhibit them. Specific predictions were a) individuals whose families value emotional display would have greater expressiveness (sending), relative to individuals whose families inhibit emotional display, and b) individuals whose families inhibit emotional display would have greater perceptiveness (judging), relative to individuals whose families value emotional display.

The importance of these hypotheses lies in exploring a variable which predicts nonverbal communication styles and in determining the family's sphere of influence on an individual's communication abilities. Knowledge of how individual differences emerge will be a significant contribution to the field of nonverbal communication.

Method

Subjects

Sixty-four undergraduate students were chosen from a pool of 115 students on the basis of their high or low scores on the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (FEQ) which they had taken previously. The questionnaire, developed for this research, consisted of 40 scenarios involving emotional expression. Subjects rated the scenes on a scale of 1 (not very frequent in my family) to 9 (very frequent in my family). In previous samples retest reliability over ten days was high ($r(43) = .88$, $p \leq .001$) and validity, assessed by perceptions of emotional display shared by family members, was moderate (median $r(31) = .29$, $p \leq .05$).

Procedure

To test the hypotheses it was necessary to measure subjects' sending and judging as well as their self-reported level of family expressiveness.

Subjects were videotaped without their knowledge while conversing for 15 minutes about happy and sad topics (self-chosen) with one of eight confederates who were students from another university. The confederates also participated in one session as subjects, and did not know that they were being videotaped. After these sessions each confederate conversed with eight different subjects as described above. All subjects and confederates were informed that they had been videotaped immediately after that portion of the study and they gave their consent for the videotapes to be used in the research.

Videotaped segments of subjects' happy and sad conversations were observed by four raters who attempted to identify during which conversation each segment occurred. These judgments constituted the measure of subjects' sending.

Videotaped segments of the confederates' first sessions were made into a judging task which was given to the subjects when they returned for a second session. The scores on this task comprised the measure of subjects' judging.

Thus, subjects had two kinds of nonverbal communication scores. Their sending scores were based on tapes of them conversing about happy or sad topics with a confederate, and their judging scores were based on their judgments of tapes of confederates conversing about happy or sad topics. Correlations between these scores and the FEQ, and analyses of variance employing the FEQ as a factor, were used to analyze the data.

Results

As predicted, the relationship between sending and family expressiveness was positive (for video total with FEQ total, $r = .24$, $p \leq .06$, two-tail). The positive sending-family expressiveness relationship was slightly stronger for happy communications than for sad communications (combining over talk and listen conditions, for happy, $r = .22$, $p \leq .10$; for sad, $r = \leq .09$) and was stable over talk and listen communications (combining over happy and sad emotions, for talk, $r = .15$; for listen, $r = .21$, $p \leq .10$).

In the 4-way ANOVA of sending, with FEQ and sex as between factors and condition (talk, listen) and positivity (happy, sad) as repeated factors, there was a main effect for family expressiveness ($F(1,240) = 4.04$, $p \leq .05$, effect size = .526).[1] As predicted, subjects from high expressive families (mean accuracy = .722) communicated more accurately than subjects from low expressive families (mean accuracy = .631). No interactions with FEQ appeared.

As predicted, the relationship between judging and family expressiveness was negative (for video total with FEQ total, $r = -.28$, $p \leq .05$, two-tail). The negative relationship with the FEQ total was stable over happy and sad communications (combining talk and listen conditions, for happy, $r = -.21$, $p \leq .10$; for sad, $r = -.15$), and was stronger for talk than listen (combining over happy and sad emotions, for talk, $r = -.27$, $p \leq .05$; for listen, $r = .02$).

In the 4-way ANOVA of judging, with FEQ and sex as between factors and condition (talk, listen) and positivity (happy, sad) as repeated factors, an interaction occurred for FEQ level and sending condition ($F(1,240) = 3.83$, $p \leq .06$, effect size = .516). The interaction suggests that individuals from low expressive families were more skilled at judging more difficult items (talk items) than were individuals from high expressive families.

The predictions that a) individuals from high expressive families would be better at nonverbal sending than individuals from low expressive families, and b) individuals from low expressive families would be better at nonverbal judging than individuals from high expressive families were supported in the correlations and two separate ANOVAs for simple effects described above.

In a final ANOVA, sending and judging were combined as an additional repeated factor. This would allow for an interaction between family expressiveness and nonverbal communication skills. In addtion to supporting the hypotheses for the simple effects, the presence of an interaction would suggest that individuals from high expressive families send nonverbal communications relatively better than they judge them, and individuals from low expressive families judge nonverbal communications relatively better than they send them. The predicted interaction did occur ($F(1, 480) = 4.24$, $p \leq .05$, effect size = .536); subjects from high expressive families were relatively more accurate senders (mean accuracy = .722) than judges (mean accuracy = .752), compared with subjects from low expressive families who were relatively more accurate judges (mean accuracy = .760) than senders (mean accuracy = .631).

Discussion

The socialization hypothesis predicts that nonverbal sending will be greater in individuals from more expressive families than in individuals from less expressive families, and that nonverbal judging will be greater in individuals from less expressive families than in individuals from more expressive families.

The positive correlations found here between sending video communications and family expressiveness and the results of the analyses of variance support the hypothesis; subjects from high expressive families were better at sending emotional communications in conversations than were subjects from low expressive families.

The negative correlations between judging video communications and family expressiveness and the results of the analyses of variance also support the hypothesis; subjects from low expressive families were better judges than subjects from high expressive families.

Finally, a disordinal interaction occurred, suggesting that individuals from high expressive families send nonverbal communications better than they judge them and individuals from low expressive families judge nonverbal communications better than they send them.

These analyses of video communications weave a pattern of clear and consistent support. Now that a relationship between family norms of emotional expression and nonverbal communica-

tion has been identified, future research should focus on how these nonverbal communication differences due to socialization develop and further, what effects these differences in communication styles may have upon social interaction.

Footnote

[1] Unlike p, the effect size estimate (d) reports the size of the effect without influence of sample size, and is defined as the difference between the means of the two groups divided by their common standard deviation. An effect size of .200 is considered small, an effect size of greater than .500 is considered visible to the naked eye, and an effect size of greater than .800 is considered "large" (Cohen, 1977).

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS AND NONVERBAL SENDING

NONVERBAL SENDING	FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS				
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	SUBMISSIVE	DOMINANT	TOTAL
HAPPY	.17+	.17+	.20+	.22*	.22*
SAD	.08	.05	.05	.13	.09
TALK	.17+	.05	.12	.16+	.15
LISTEN	.13	.21*	.17+	.24*	.21*
TOTAL	.20+	.17+	.19+	.26*	.24*

N = 64

+$p \leq .10$, ONE-TAIL

*$p \leq .05$, ONE-TAIL

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS AND NONVERBAL SENDING WAS SIGNIFICANT IN AN ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ($F(1,240) = 4.04$, $p \leq .05$, EFFECT SIZE = .526). AS PREDICTED, SUBJECTS FROM HIGH EXPRESSIVE FAMILIES (MEAN ACCURACY = .722) COMMUNICATED MORE ACCURATELY THAN SUBJECTS FROM LOW EXPRESSIVE FAMILIES (MEAN ACCURACY = .631).

CORRELATIONS OF FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS WITH NONVERBAL JUDGING

NONVERBAL JUDGING	FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS				
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	SUBMISSIVE	DOMINANT	TOTAL
HAPPY	-.09	-.26*	-.16+	-.24*	-.21*
SAD	-.23*	.04	-.13	-.14	-.15
TALK	-.27*	-.14	-.27*	-.23*	-.27**
LISTEN	-.00	.03	.07	-.06	.02
TOTAL	-.26*	-.17+	-.23*	-.30**	-.28**

N = 64

+$p \leq .10$, ONE-TAIL

*$p \leq .05$, ONE-TAIL

**$p \leq .01$, ONE-TAIL

SUBJECTS FROM LOW EXPRESSIVE FAMILIES WERE MORE ACCURATE JUDGES OF NONVERBAL CUES THAN WERE SUBJECTS FROM HIGH EXPRESSIVE FAMILIES.

SUBJECTS' MEAN NONVERBAL JUDGING ACCURACY FOR THE INTERACTION OF FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS AND SENDING CONDITION

NONVERBAL SENDING CONDITION	FAMILY EXPRESSIVENESS	
	LOW	HIGH
TALK	.739	.697
LISTEN	.781	.802

$N = 64$

$F(1,240) = 3.83$, $p \leq .06$, EFFECT SIZE = .516)

TALK ITEMS WERE MORE DIFFICULT ITEMS TO JUDGE THAN LISTEN ITEMS ($F(1,240) = 20.67$, $p \leq .001$, EFFECT SIZE = 1.176; FOR TALK, MEAN ACCURACY = .718, FOR LISTEN, MEAN ACCURACY = .792).

Subjects' Mean Accuracy for the Interaction of Family Expressiveness and Nonverbal Communication Skill

Family Expressiveness	Nonverbal Communication Skill	
	Sending	Judging
Low	.631	.760
High	.722	.752

N = 64

$F(1, 480) = 4.24$, $p \leq .05$, effect size = .536)

As predicted, subjects from low expressive families were relatively more accurate judges than senders, and subjects from high expressive families were relatively more accurate senders than judges.